STIRNER AS HEGELIAN

LAWRENCE S. STEPELEVICH

From its first appearance in 1844, Max Stirner's major work, Der Einzige und sein Eigentum, has produced little agreement among its many interpreters. The very first of these interpreters was Friedrich Engels, who suggested that Stirner's doctrines would be quite compatible with Benthamite utilitarianism, which he then admired, and even saw in these doctrines the potential of benefiting communism. Marx, in short order, corrected this optimistic deviation, and then—with a surely repentant Engels—set forth the orthodox gospel for all future generations of communists: Stirner, or "Sankt Max," was but the speculative spokesman for the petty bourgeois, a decadent Hegelian boasting over the unrestraint of his self-inflated ego. Sidney Hook echoed Marx when he condemned Stirner's work as but the "social defense mechanism of a petty bourgeois soul." Others, unsatisfied with this "petty" status, elevate him to that of the Grand Bourgeois, or Fascist. Still others, taking an opposite stance, see in Stirner the most articulate defender of individual liberty. In between, he has been called a nihilist, an anarchist, an existentialist, a solipsist, an anti-Benthamite, an intemperate capitalist, or—as we might now suspect—an anti-capitalist. At least two commentators, lost in the confusion, have managed to escape the need to classify Stirner within the ongoing political and ethical categories and simply declare him to be insane. In short, the list of radically diverse interpretations of Stirner can almost match the list of works on Stirner—and these number into the hundreds, despite a general show of indifference to Stirner among academics. But in surveying all of these diverse interpretations, there is yet one generally agreed upon point: that Stirner (1806-56) was not only a disciple of Hegel, but that he was, in the phrase of David McLellan, "the last of the Hegelians." Engels, the first to comment upon Stirner, also was of the opinion that with Stirner the "decomposition process" of the Hegelian school came to an end. Franz Mehring, the biographer of Marx, also held to the same view:

> Stirner was "the last offshoot of Hegelian philosophy." Kurt Mautz, who, in 1936, wrote a comprehensive study of the relationship between Hegel and Stirner, described Stirner as "the last metamorphosis of German Idealism." Perhaps the French scholar Henri Arvon stated the matter most elegantly, for to him Stirner was "le dernier maillon de la chaîne hégélienne." And finally, even Stirner elected himself to that extreme position.

With this widely held relationship to Hegel, it could be expected that at least some of the major commentaries concerning Stirner would have philosophically tested that connection and would have sought to establish a logical link between Hegel and his disciple, a link which would reach its final term in Stirner. But this is not the case. A survey of the commentaries upon Stirner reveals that philosophers, Hegelian or otherwise, have ignored the issue. Considering the steady rise of interest in Hegel and Hegelianism—not the least being a rise in interest concerning the consequences of taking Hegel seriously—such neglect is surprising. When Stirner is considered, his Hegelian background is seldom touched upon for the obvious reason that the great majority of his commentators, academic or otherwise, are evidently unfamiliar with either philosophy in general or Hegelianism in particular. Academic commentators are drawn mainly from the ranks of political scientists and historians.

With the exception of Kurt Mautz's work, no commentators can be found who have taken the thought of Stirner seriously from a philosophical point of view and in relationship to Hegel's doctrines. With the exceptions of Marx and Engels, no philosophers with a known Hegelian

background have considered Stirner seriously as a philosopher. The sudden decline of interest in Hegel's philosophy, which followed in a few decades after his death, combined with the prominence of Marxian political theory, with its wholehearted contempt of any form of egoism which seemed inextricably linked to capitalistic evils, makes this neglect of Stirner quite understandable. From the moment of its appearance, Stirner's work was usually treated apart from the influence of Hegel and usually dismissed as but a radical and generally noxious egoism.

If a survey of the literature concerning Stirner restricts itself to academic sources and ignores the many littérateurs (e.g., James Huneker l6) and ethical-political polemicists (e.g., James A. Martin), it will be found that the majority are political scientists and period historians. For example there are two American academics who have recently written about Stirner in the course of their studies of Hegelianism: William J. Brazill and John Edward Toews. Brazill, who wrote an interesting and popular study, The Young Hegelians (New Haven, 1970), was a Professor of History. Toews, whose erudite work, Hegelianism (Cambridge, 1980), is soon to be followed by another treatment of this school, is also a Professor of History. Although being professionally involved in history rather than philosophy hardly entails a lack of philosophic interest and insight, a lack often evidenced even among "professional" philosophers, it yet naturally encourages a primary historical concern with the subject at hand. And so it is, with both Brazill and Toews, Hegelianism—a fortiori Stirnerism—is seen as more of a historical period than as a philosophical position. As Toews candidly remarks— and in this he but expressed what all historians and political scientists find proper— "Hegelian philosophy has been treated throughout this study as a subjectively coherent system of ideas, beliefs, and assumptions whose 'subjective coherence' was rooted in a particular configuration of psychological, social, and historical experience." Among academics sharing such views Stirnerian thought would be reduced to no more than "a particular configuration" of Stirner's psychological experiences, social ties, or historical placement. In any case, the actual philosophical and logical ties between Hegel and Stirner would be dissolved within this historicist context.

The two major English commentators upon Stirner, Ronald W. K Paterson and David L. McLellan, are equally unconcerned about Stirner's Hegelianism. Paterson, who has written the only English language book-length study focused on Stirner, is a Professor of Education, and McLellan is a lecturer on Politics and Government. Paterson's work occasionally mentions Hegel as being the source of all of the ills of Young Hegelianism in general and Stirner in particular, but does not reach back to Hegel to establish Stirner as his heir, and restricts itself mainly to explicating the content and influence of Stirnerianism. McLellan is even less interested in Hegel, being more concerned with Stirner's relationship to Marx. This, of course, is his intention, and his book is entitled The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx (London, 1969). But even here (136), where Stirner is described as "the last of the Hegelians," more might be expected to be said about his work than that it "was to a large extent an amalgam of current clichés."

Among the German commentators, there is Hans G. Helms, whose massive study of Stirner, Die Ideologie der anonymen Gesellschaft (Köln, 1966), is marred by Helm's Marxian polemics. Helms, however, unlike Marx, is inclined to ignore Hegel completely. Helms is a free-lance writer. One of the latest studies concerning Stirner issued by a German publishing house is Bernd Kast's Die Thematik des 'Eigners' in der Philosophie Max Stirners (Bonn, 1979). Once

again, Hegel is barely mentioned, and then only in a historical context. Dr. Kast is a Dozent für deutscher Sprache und Literatur at the University of Utrecht.

Among the French commentators there is Henri Arvon, a lecturer on German studies at the University of Paris. Again, in his Aux Sources de L'Existentialisme: Max Stirner, Hegel is left virtually unmentioned, just as in Victor Basch's early study, L'Individualisme Anarchiste: Max Stirner (Paris, 1904)—Basch was a Professor of Literature.

Of course, such studies, all conducted from standpoints other than philosophical, can be both interesting and informative for anyone examining the historical progress of Hegelianism after Hegel or for anyone interested in a re-statement of Stirner's work. However, if Stirner is also seen by these scholars as the disciple of Hegel, then it seems only right that he be accorded a philosophical evaluation that would take into account his grounding in Hegelianism. But this would require some appreciation and informed insight into Hegelian philosophy, a requirement that might well prove unattractive even to those trained in philosophy. This evident lack of concern regarding Stirner's Hegelianism, or, for that matter, the "Hegelianism" of the Young Hegelians in general, e.g., Feuerbach and Marx, has had the effect of rendering them virtually unintelligible from a philosophical viewpoint and has transformed them into simply "historical figures" reflective of that "particular configuration" known as the German Vormärz, that period just prior to the Berlin revolution of March 1848. It has also had the effect of transforming "Hegelianism" into Hegel scholarship and so limiting the possible appreciation of the actual effects of Hegelianism upon present consciousness. Incidental to this, of course, is the widespread confusion of just what Hegel did maintain. One particular instance might serve to illustrate this: in McLellan's otherwise informative work, he observes that "Hegel had divided world history into three periods: the Oriental, the Graeco-Roman, and the Germano-Christian; for Cieszkowski, antiquity was the first period, the second stretched from Christ to Hegel, and the third was yet to come."

McLellan, in so mistakenly attributing three periods to Hegel's classification of historical epochs, has lost the main key to a fundamental understanding of Cieszkowski's critique of Hegel, a critique which rests upon the premise that Hegel's four moments of history— the Oriental, the Greek, the Roman, and the German-Christian—were not the expressions of the triadic dialectic appropriate to the living organism of history, which should thus be divided into past, present, and future. By slighting Hegel, the Young Hegelians are misrepresented.

But again, as already noted, despite this common lack of interest in Hegel, there has still been a general agreement in regard to Stirner, i.e. he is "the last of the Hegelians." In its usual meaning, this is merely intended to place Stirner at the end of a historical series of ever more decadent inheritors of Hegel's doctrines. There is, however, a radically different way of taking this characterization. One of the very few philosophically inclined commentators, Karl Löwith, has detected the logical connection. In contesting the accepted viewpoint that Stirner's work, Der Einzige und sein Eigentum is but "the anarchic product of an eccentric," Löwith proceeds to note that "it is in reality an ultimate logical consequence of Hegel's historical system" (es ist aber vielmehr eine letzte Konsequenz aus Hegels weltgeschichtlicher Konstraktion). In this rare philosophical viewpoint, the accepted historical relationship in which Stirner merely "follows" Hegel is elevated into a rational dependency in which Stirner is understood as the logical consequence of Hegel's doctrines. In Hegelian terms, the thought of Stirner is taken as a phenomenological exemplification of spirit's advance to ultimate self-knowledge. In Heideggerian terms, what Löwith suggests is that Stirner's thought be taken up as geschichtlich

and not merely historisch. My aim in this essay is to do this, at least in a suggestive outline. It is here hoped that the label, “the last of the Hegelians,” will obtain some rational signification that would even go beyond Löwith’s passing insight to the point that Stirner’s thought might well be considered the ultimate consequence of Hegelianism. Certainly, there can be a number of logical consequences of Hegelianism, as the school of Young Hegelians attest; but there cannot be more than one ultimate logical consequence of Hegelianism, and it might well be the philosophy of Stirner.

In any attempt to establish a logical nexus between Hegel and Stirner one should first investigate the actual historical relationship that held between them. For the committed Hegelian, historical posteriority is a condition sine qua non for the fixing of a logical dependency. History and logic are the inseparable forms of Spirit.

It requires little effort to discover that Stirner enjoyed a deep and lengthy familiarity with the philosophical ideas of both Hegel and his followers. Oddly enough, this easily established connection has seldom, if ever, attracted the interest of either Hegelian scholars or the putative followers of Stirner, and there is nothing to parallel the pride Marxists seem to take in the declaration of the young Marx that he “had got to know Hegel from beginning to end, and most of his disciples as well.”

Stirner may or may not have first encountered Hegelianism during his school years at the Imhof Gymnasium from 1819 to 1826. In any case, the gymnasium had George Andreas Gabler (1786-1853) as its Rector, the same Gabler who finally assumed the chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin that was vacated upon Hegel’s death in 1831. Upon his graduation, the twenty-year old Stirner entered directly into the University of Berlin as a student of philosophy. He remained at the university for the next four semesters until September of 1828. In this period he, unlike Strauss, Marx, or Engels, had the opportunity to hear Hegel lecture upon his system. He attended Hegel’s lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, the History of Philosophy, and, in the winter of 1827, his lectures on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit. During his stay at the university he also attended the lectures of the Hegelian theologian P. K. Marheineke (1780-1846) on the subjects of Dogmatics, Theology, and Christian symbolism. In the fall of 1828, Stirner (who was, like Feuerbach, without money) had to leave the University of Berlin to attend the University of Erlangen, where he could live with relatives. In that fall semester Stirner attended the lectures then being presented by the Hegelian philosopher Christian Kapp (1790 1874). Kapp’s Hegelian inspirations were evidenced in his 1826 treatise Das konkrete Allgemeine der Weltgeschichte (Erlangen, 1826). Feuerbach, who would later become a close friend of Kapp, was at Erlangen during that same semester, writing his doctoral dissertation, but there is no evidence that Stirner met with Feuerbach at that time.

It would seem probable, however, that these two young Hegelians would have met. In any case, their philosophic histories would soon become deeply intertwined. In 1832 Stirner returned once again to Berlin, where he would spend the rest of his life. There, continuing his philosophical studies, he attended a two semester course on Aristotle conducted by the Hegelian philosopher Karl L. Michelet (1801-93). This formal acquaintance with Hegelian philosophy and Hegelian philosophers, much more extensive than that obtained by any of the Young Hegelians, was informally supplemented by Berlin’s notorious Freien—a group of politically active Hegelians who met more or less regularly in various clubs and Weinstuben. Stirner entered into a lifelong friendship with their recognized leader and Marx’s earlier mentor, Bruno Bauer (1809-82). But although Bauer’s brilliant and uncompromising criticisms of both the

gospel narratives and German academic life had made him a center of public and official attention, Stirner was never cast into the shadow of Bauer's intellectual pyrotechnics, and, as Stirner's then "duzbruder" ["du bruder"] Engels wrote, Stirner "had obviously, among the 'Free Ones' the most talent, independence, and diligence."

Even if there had been no actual historical record of Stirner's intimate relationship with Hegelian thought, his writing would bear testimony to his indebtedness to Hegel. For this purpose only one work of Stirner's would need to be consulted, Der Einzige und sein Eigentum. His writings before and after this singular work are relatively insignificant. His thought finds its full and final expression in this one book, and if he had not written it, he would be not undeservedly forgotten. A reading of this work provides ample evidence that Stirner was well acquainted with the whole of Hegel's major writings, and the literature of his contemporary Hegelians. On this point, as R. W. K. Paterson observes in an otherwise critical study, Stirner displayed a "detailed familiarity with the crucial philosophical literature of the day. From the internal evidence of Der Einzige, it is clear that he was conversant with Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind, with his Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences, his Philosophy of Right, and his published lectures on the philosophy of history.... From the works directly cited or discernibly used in the writing of Der Einzige alone, it is indisputable that Stirner had prepared himself for his comprehensive evaluation of existing German ideology by massive researches into the distinctive complexion of the major philosophical coalitions of the day."

In short, Der Einzige was hardly "an amalgam of current cliches," for this work, written when its author was thirty-eight years old, was, as Stirner himself remarked, "the laborious work of the best years of his life." Surely of Stirner it can be said, even more so than for a nineteen-year-old Marx, that he "had got to know Hegel from beginning to end, and most of his disciples as well."

But now, having placed Stirner within the academic context of Hegelianism, the question of just how this historical immediacy and familiarity finds expression in his work remains to be considered upon a cursory first reading, most would likely agree with Santayana's evaluation of Stirner's Der Einzige: "It is a bold, frank, and rather tiresome protest against the folly of moral idealism, against the sacrifice of the individual to any ghostly powers such as God, duty, the state, humanity, or society; all of which this redoubtable critic called 'spooks' and regarded as fixed ideas and pathological obsessions." Following along this line, which takes the work as primarily a "protest" against such apparently Hegelian forms of the Objective Spirit as the state, there is also an evidently "unHegelian" structure and tone to the work as a whole. In structure, the work is divided into but two main sections, "Der Mensch" and "Ich." Such a division would certainly disappoint anyone looking for that unmistakable signature of Hegelianism, the triad. Further, not only is no particular reference made to the dialectic, but the Einzige is cast in a style that is also—at least in the common conception of what a "Hegelian" style should be—decidedly "unHegelian." In short, Stirner employs none of the technical vocabulary or the cryptic form so often marking out the Hegelian from other schools. Added to this is Stirner's open and sharp criticisms of Hegel and the Hegelians which form the greater part of this work. In sum, as I have documented in an earlier essay, there is certainly reason to agree with a number of commentators upon Stirner and to call him the "Anti-Hegel." After all, it is but a small leap, from the Hegelian standpoint, from being "the last of the Hegelians" to being the "AntiHegel." Such a leap would be fully in accord with the logic of history. But, and this would be a critical turn precisely because of this terminal or antithetical posture towards Hegelianism, Stirner would be,

insofar as his thought is grounded in Hegelianism, the perfected Hegelian. To a student of Hegel, and Stirner was surely that, this would not be a simple paradox, but rather the expected, indeed necessitated, result of carrying forth any doctrine to its "ultimate logical conclusion." There would be, in this conclusion, both a negative and a positive moment. Hence, Stirner as "Anti-Hegel" can also be understood as the completed Hegel. Such an understanding would be in accord with all the requirements of the dialectical binding of premises with conclusions. In that it can be, and has been, reasonably maintained that Stirner concludes Hegel as the opposite of Hegel, it can also be maintained reasonably, i.e., dialectically, that he concludes Hegel as the fulfillment of Hegel. This relationship, so paradoxical to thought unfamiliar with dialectical reasoning, is in large measure responsible for the misunderstanding not only of Stirner but of those other "consequences" of Hegel's teaching, the Young Hegelians. The "Old Hegelians" such as C. F. Göschel (1784-1861) were merely content to repeat Hegel in different terms, e.g., Goschel's Aphorismen and so they avoided the misunderstandings visited upon the Young Hegelians when they attempted to develop Hegel's philosophy dialectically, a process that would first require that simple, repetitive discipleship be abandoned for the purpose of adding to that doctrine. This intention is present in all of the Young Hegelians, and is in fact that which makes them appropriately called Young Hegelians.

As already noted, Stirner's work is divided into the sections entitled "Der Mensch" and "Ich," and so there is no immediate evidence of any triadic formulation. But what has occurred here is that Hegel's work, in particular the Phenomenology of Mind, is covertly serving as the thesis of Stirner's work. The main juncture leading from Hegel to Stirner is found at the termination of a phenomenological passage to absolute knowledge. Stirner's work is most clearly understood when it is taken to be the answer to the question "what role will consciousness play after it has traversed the series of shapes known as 'untrue' knowledge and has attained to absolute knowledge?" In simple terms, Stirner addresses the major problem of Hegelians after Hegel, "What is now to be done?" Obviously, Hegel can be elevated into a cult-object, analyzed, cited, and otherwise admired, but is this "Hegelianism"? Or, is it more likely that Hegel's own words, which Stirner would have heard, be taken as a call to go "beyond" Hegel? In concluding his lectures on the History of Philosophy, Hegel cast a challenge: "It is my desire that this history of Philosophy should contain for you a summons to grasp the spirit of the times, which is present in us by nature and, each in his own place, consciously to bring it from its natural condition, i.e., from its lifeless seclusion, into the light of day." What then was "the spirit of the times"? For Stirner it would have been Hegelianism, and what he intended was to bring it "into the light of day."

All of the immediate disciples of Hegel were faced, after his death, with the problem of adding to a philosophical system that claimed to be absolute and that had put an end to all further essential progress. The options open were clearly limited for these followers, and even the funeral eulogy over Hegel's grave compared the Hegelians to the satraps of Alexander, having nothing more to do than to divide the heritage. There would be, in short, no more intellectual conquests for the reason that with and in Hegel Geist had obtained perfect self-reflection.

Faced with this theoretical impasse, the disciples could either content themselves with but a further explication of that inherited system, or boldly declare that the time of systems and theory was past and an age of praxis and materiality had dawned. The "Old" and "Right" Hegelians, such as Göschel, Rosenkranz (1805-79), and Marheineke, contented themselves

with the former alternative, the “Young” and “Left” Hegelians chose the latter, partly because they were never firmly imbedded within the German academic establishment. Stirner, who is usually associated with the Young Hegelians, was nevertheless—as the countering polemics of The German Ideology indicates—one of the most effective critics of that very school. Again, his work is decidedly not a call to any form of “world-transforming” praxis, as would be more or less the case with all of the other Young Hegelians. What sets Stirner apart from the Hegelians of both the Right and the Left, or the Old and the Young, and has made him a most difficult subject for classification is that Stirner’s point of departure from Hegel is found in Hegel’s Phenomenology, not, as in the case of all others, in the Religionsphilosophie, the Rechtsphilosophie, or in some other element of Hegel’s system. Only David F. Strauss found the Phenomenology of central importance, but for the reason that within it there were two conceptions of vital moment for his biblical criticisms: the first, the distinction between religious representation (Vorstellung) and philosophical concept (Begriff) the second, in the conception of the link between the advance of history and consciousness.

Stirner, although not ignoring this latter point, nevertheless derives his thought by taking the final chapter of the Phenomenology, “Absolute Knowledge” (Das Absolute Wissen), as his starting point. Insofar as he was a Hegelian, Stirner would be expected to assume that this absolute knowledge was indeed the state of his consciousness. His particular complementing of Hegel consisted in taking the “we” of Hegel’s Phenomenology—that constant observer and sometimes director of the course of knowledge from its beginning in apparent sense-certainty to its conclusion in absolute knowledge—as himself. Stirner, in short, takes himself to be a singular example of that class of phenomenological observers that Hegel simply calls “we” throughout the whole odyssey of consciousness as portrayed in his Phenomenology. Stirner, however, does not give himself either the name “I” or “Stirner” but rather introduces into philosophical literature a new term intended to convey the note of radical exclusiveness, a term that would lie outside of all classifications: “Der Einzige.” This term has been generally translated as “The Unique One,” which, as Moses Hess noted, is quite different from either Bruno Bauer’s designation of self as “Der Einsamen” (“The Solitary”) or Feuerbach’s wished-for “Gattungswesen” (“Species-Being”). Der Einzige is Stirner because he has passed beyond that “highway of despair” marked by the untrue forms of consciousness, and hence beyond definition. He is not even to be designated as Ich. Nearing the close of his work, Stirner in denying any communality or generality discards even the Fichtean “Ich” as a description of himself:

> Fichte’s ego (Ich) is also . . . outside me, for every one is an ego; and if only this ego has rights, then it is “the ego” (das Ich), and not I. But I am not an ego along with other egos, but the sole ego (das alleinige Ich): I am unique (Ich bin einzig). Hence my wants and my deeds are also unique; in short, everything about me is unique. And it is only as this unique being that I take everything as my own, as I set myself to work, and develop myself, only as this unique being. I do not develop mankind or man, but as I, I develop—myself (als Ich entwickle Ich—Mich). This is the meaning of the Unique One (Dies ist der Sinn da— Einzigen).

A clear passage that leads directly from Hegel’s phenomenologically transcendent “we” to Stirner’s “Unique One” is found in the concluding paragraphs of the Phenomenology. Here, at that final moment in which knowledge ends its unhappy but necessary experiences with its untrue “shapes” and reveals itself as Absolute Wissen, it is immediately identified with the

individual ego—Stirner's "Einziger": "This last shape of Spirit— the spirit which at the same time gives its complete and true content the form of the Self and thereby realizes its Notion as remaining in its Notion in this realization—this is absolute knowing .... The nature, moments, and movement of this knowing have, then, shown themselves to be such that this knowing is a pure being-for-self of self-consciousness; it is 'I', that is this and no other 'I' (es ist Ich, das dieses und kein anderes Ich), and which is no less immediately a mediated or superseded universal 'I'. Consciousness has a content which it differentiates from itself; for it is pure negativity or the dividing of itself (denn es ist die reine Negativität oder das sich Entzweien), it is self-consciousness. This content in sundering itself is the 'I', for it is the movement of superseding itself, or the same pure negation that the 'I' is."

Clearly in this passage, and more or less clearly in all of the concluding passages of the Phenomenology, the foundations of Stirner's doctrines regarding the nature of the completed conscious self, i.e., the self-conscious phenomenological observer, can be detected. There are three complementary and closely-related principles which Stirner would find in Hegelianism in order to conceive what could be called a "perfected" or "last" Hegelianism: first the evident principle that the path of knowledge ends in pure self-consciousness. On this matter, Stirner has been called an "egoist," although he himself denied that particularly pejorative twist to his doctrines. Perhaps, on this point, support might be found for Stirner's interpretation in Kojève's reading of Hegel. For Kojève, Hegel as "the Wise Man, the Man of absolute Knowledge," is the one "who is fully and perfectly self-conscious." This lucidity of consciousness will naturally stand over and against the inclination to set fixed and opaque Ideen into the role of being the proper objects of consciousness. Stirner's independence of such fixed categories as the "State" or "Mankind" has naturally led him to be charged with selfishness, i.e., egoism. Marx, who well understood the profound relationship existing between Hegel and Stirner, fully grasped the consequences which would follow from a "perfected" Hegelianism, and he, along with Engels, wrote the polemical German Ideology almost exclusively against Stirner and the whole tendency to extrapolate Hegel into individualism. One passage (209) from this extremely tendentious work reveals Marx's insight into the connection between Hegel, Stirner, and those "fixed ideas" that the latter called Spuken (spooks): "Hegel, for whom the modern world was also resolved by Stirner into the world of abstract ideas, defines the task of the modern philosopher...: the modern philosopher should 'abolish firm, definite, fixed thoughts'. This, he adds, is accomplished by 'dialectics'. (Phänomenologie, 26, 27.) The difference between 'Stirner' and Hegel is that the former achieves the same thing without the help of dialectics."

The reason that dialectics can be abandoned is that, with the end of the phenomenological Erfahrung, the negative aspect of reason is no longer required, for there is no longer a cognitive need for self-criticism. Marx would also envision this positive goal, but only after a further period of self-denial for communal ends. Stirner implies that with the end of the history of conscious self-denial as found both in the Phenomenology and in that section of Der Einzige entitled "Ein Menchenleben," a new age free of self-imposed limitations has dawned.

The second principle that Stirner derives from Hegel is that this absolute embodiment of selfconsciousness is not merely an ego, but a unique ego (dieses und kein anderes Ich). In sum, the dominant idea emerges: the phenomenological "we" of Hegel—interpreted by Kojève as the "Wise Man"—has been crystallized by Stirner into Der Einzige. Absolute knowledge can exist only within the particular consciousness; it is not a self-subsistent entity but rather the self-comprehending, and infinite, relationship of self to self: in the Phenomenology (490) "the

immediate unity of self-knowledge." But this self-consciousness does not, either in Hegel or in Stirner, end in solipsism. In the case of Stirner, there is nothing to indicate that he is anti-social, if by this is meant that absolute self-awareness must tend inexorably to intellectual narcissism. Indeed, in what must seem paradoxical to anyone who considers him as merely an egoist, Stirner proposed a "Union of Egoists" (Verein von Egoisten), which he offered as a voluntary collective against an ideological communality. With Stirner, just as with Hegel, there is an awareness that they have, at least in consciousness (Ego, 184), overcome the limits of what Hegel termed "the logic of understanding," that would impose antithetical and fixed categories upon the mind. Although well aware that to most others a person is classified under such disjunctive headings as either "man" or "un-man" (this latter being, to Stirner, "a man who does not correspond to the concept man") Stirner is yet willing to risk the charge of what "Logic calls ... a 'self-contradictory judgment' " (177) by asserting that "I am really Man and the un-man in one; for I am a man and at the same time more than a man; I am the ego of this my mere quality" (Ich bin das Ich dieser meiner blossen Eigenschaft) (178). Incidental to this "refusal to be bound by the abstract deliverances of understanding," as Hegel would state it, Stirner also takes the opportunity to criticize the Feuerbachian Marx for demanding "I must become a 'real species being' (wirkliches Gattungswesen)." In sum, I believe it defensible to maintain that Stirner's "egoism," which has caused him to be the target of so much moralizing criticism, is ultimately grounded in Hegel's conception that absolute knowledge would not merely culminate in an ego, but in a unique ego; and this ego, being beyond the forms of consciousness that sets definitions, is undefinable. This conclusion would lead to the third principle drawn from Hegel, a principle closely related to the first two: that the unique ego which culminates the phenomenological experience is also, in its immediacy, a purely negative "reality" transcending conceptual history.

As Hegel once confessed to being the spiritual son of Goethe, it is appropriate for Stirner to use a line from Goethe to begin and end his book: "Ich hab' mein' Sach' auf Nichts gestellt," which translates into "I have set my cause upon nothing." We can now say that it is more than a bit of literary decoration, for it encapsulates the view of both Hegel and Stirner in regard to the fundamental nature of pure subjectivity. Most commentators, not having looked to Hegel, merely see this line as a declaration of anarchistic nihilism, just as in the title of Patterson's 1971 book, The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner. But Stirner is no more the nihilist than Hegel or Sartre, who speaks of consciousness as "the worm of nothingness." Patterson's misinterpretation of Stirner as a nihilist commits a common error based upon ignoring the phenomenology of consciousness. Neither Stirner nor Hegel are so onesided in their comprehension of the individual ego as to present it as a merely negative entity, nor for that matter should it follow that anyone proposing this should be castigated as a "nihilist."

With Stirner, just as with Hegel, a positive note of Creativity follows immediately upon the discernment of the negativity inherent in the activity of the conscious ego: "I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything" (Ego, 5). Hegel set forth this positive feature of that "reine Negativität, die Ich ist" in a manner clearly anticipating Stirner's creative ego. "In this knowing, then, Spirit has concluded the movement in which it has shaped itself, in so far as this shaping was burdened with the difference of consciousness [i.e. of the latter from its object], a difference now overcome. Spirit has won the pure element of its existence, the Notion, The content, in accordance with the freedom of its being, is the self-alienating Self [sich entäussernde Selbst] or the immediate unity of self knowledge. The pure movement of this alienation [Entäusserung],

considered in connection with the content, constitutes the necessity of the content. The distinct content, as determinate, is in relation, is not 'in itself; it is its own restless process of superseding itself, or negativity; therefore negativity or diversity, like free being, is also the Self; and in this self-like form in which existence is immediately thought, the content is the Notion" (Begriff). This particular recent translation of A. V. Miller is misleading in some respects. Not only is Notwendigkeit rendered "negativity," but, and more important for our purposes, Entäusserung is translated as "alienation." Hegel's intention is to illustrate the compatibility of the self and its expression, their unity within the comprehending Spirit, not their "alienation." Entäusserung both etymoligically and in the context of Hegel's discussion is more fittingly translated as "utterance" rather than as "alienation." This latter usage directly leads to a favored Marxian term: "estrangement (Entfremdung)." Self-expression, for both Hegel and Stirner, is in its completed form a restatement of, rather than a form of selfopposition or "alienation."

To conclude, the "nothingness" of the self is only abstract subjectivity in itself, which must find its dialectical complement in another "nothingness," that of abstract objectivity or mere "thinghood." For both Hegel and Stirner the interaction of these two empty abstractions initiated between the indeterminate freedom of subjectivity and the indeterminate necessity of pure objectivity, i.e., into indifferent matter (gleichgültigen Dinge), comprises the whole of actuality. Neither self nor thing can claim actual being in separation, and the nexus between self and thing is to be found—again for both Hegel and Stirner—in the notion of property. The actual being, i.e. the "objectivity" of the unique ego, is found in property. In sum, der Einzige und sein Eigentum are one and the same concrete being. It is no accident that Stirner's last literary efforts were directed to translating Adam Smith, and that Hegel's "communism" can only be extended with great effort to cover his political conceptions but in no way his economics.

In holding that mere ego, abstract personality, must find its freedom, happiness, and concreteness in ownership, Stirner plainly follows Hegel. On their common views regarding the priority of property over freedom, concreteness, and full personal self-expression—this latter being at least the condition for happiness—the most evident and secure parallels can be found by reading Stirner in the light of Hegel's Rechtsphilosophie. If the Phenomenology affords access to understanding Stirner's attitude toward the general nature and intentions of self-consciousness, so the Rechtsphilosophie reveals, in a formal manner, the rational structure that supports Stirner's seemingly extreme doctrines regarding the priority of property over freedom. For both Stirner and Hegel freedom without property or some form of embodiment is unintelligible. Personal freedom, without expression, i.e., without objectification, is being without appearance, a one-sided abstraction, which, although a rallying cry for a reign of terror, is yet but a flatus vocalis, a noise, not a word. Hegel is clear on this creative relationship holding between abstract subjectivity and abstract objectivity: they are mediated into concrete actuality only through the will to property. In the actual world, neither subjects nor things alone can claim rationality (both being nothing an sich). That claim can only be made in the case of a synthesis via property in which the Entäusserung of the subject, a willed act, is embodied in a process which renders both subject and thing intelligible.

A "thing" itself, which Hegel calls eine Sache—that same "Sache" which Stirner would regard as "nothing"—is said by Hegel to be "Unfreies, Unpersönliches und Rechtloses." For Stirner, "nothing at all is justified by being" (Ego, 341). Everything is, in short, potential property. Further, as Hegel notes, since "all things may become man's property, because man is free will and consequently is absolute," so that man, precisely as free and absolute, is empowered to

possess what he will. For Stirner, the scope of possible property extends into the realm of thought itself: “As the world as property has become a material with which I undertake what I will, so the spirit too as property must sink down into a material before which I no longer entertain any sacred dread” (Ego, 357). This “ideal” property, just as anything which Stirner can possess, use and discard, i.e., alienate, is taken as his property, as private. Stirner has no communal property. In this he also follows Hegel’s general thesis: “Since my will, as the will of a person, and so a single will, becomes objective to me in property, property acquires the character of private property; and common property of such a nature that it may be owned by separate persons acquires the character of an inherently dissoluble partnership in which the retention of my share is explicitly a matter of my arbitrary preference.” From this point, Hegel goes on to criticize Plato’s communistic theory of property in the Republic and observes that “the general principle that underlies Plato’s Ideal State violates the right of personality by forbidding the holding of private property” (Ibid.).

Communists and Socialists were major targets of Stirner’s criticism. He was never lured into thinking that a “revolution” could be anything more than a new turn of the political wheel, with new masters proclaiming equality or freedom as the new ideals of the age. “Communism, by the abolition of all personal property, only presses me back still more into dependence on another, to wit, on the generality or collectivity; and, loudly as it always attacks the ‘State,’ what it intend’ is itself again a State, a status, a condition hindering my free movements, a sovereign power over me” (Ego, 257). Marx, as the heated and extensive polemics of the German Ideology fully indicate, was well aware of the early and fundamental threat that Stirnerian individualism posed to collectivism. The persistence, on both a popular and professional level, of literature directed for and against Stirner proves that he had correctly perceived the matter. Attempts to realize the unrealizable, i.e., ideals such as universal property or love or freedom, will always miscarry: “All attempts to enact rational laws about property have put out from the bay of love into a desolate sea of regulations” (Ibid.). The problem is not, for Stirner, to be found in a deficiency of will—“What one can become he does become” (Ego, 325)—but rather in the false belief that one’s ideas are not one’s possessions, but have an objectivity and substantiality apart from the knowing ego. It is by stressing the point of absolute ownership that Stirner, in no way contradicting Hegel, goes beyond Hegel.

For those who have not passed through the Bildung that leads to absolute Knowledge, thoughts are uncritically taken as objects set over and against their subjectivity: “He has his thoughts ‘from above’ and gets no further” (Ego, 44). Those who submit themselves to being possessed by these ideals and intentions rather than possessing them in their own subjectivity are rightly called “unselfish” or, as Stirner would also have it, “possessed.” As he notes: “Is it perchance only people possessed by the devil that meet us, or do we as often come upon people possessed in the contrary way—possessed by ‘the good,’ by virtue, morality, the law, or some ‘principle’ or other? Possessions of the devil are not the only ones. God works on us, and the devil does; the former ‘workings of grace,’ the latter ‘workings of the devil.’ Possessed [bessessene] people are set [versessen] in their opinions” (Ego, 45).

In short, thoughts, ideals, are to Stirner alienable property: “The thought is my own only when I have no misgivings about bringing it in danger of death every moment, when I do not have to fear its loss as a loss for me” (Ego, 342). Rather than possessing the idea of God, or man, or state, this possessed ego lives in an inverted reality. Taking the ego as prior to all ideality, Stirner found himself immediately at odds with all of his contemporaries. Although he

shared their notion that Hegelianism did not end in Hegel, he rejected their new presuppositions, which took the general form that Hegelianism itself would serve as the basis of a new pursuit of ideals, would itself become an ideal.

To Stirner, and with Stirner, Hegelianism had accomplished its task of freeing the self from its self-inflicted domination of fixed ideas. Hegel had clearly proposed this as the ultimate intention of his philosophy, and in the preface of the Phenomenology he asserts: ". . . the task before us consists not so much in getting the individual clear of the state of sensuous immediacy . . . but .. . consists in actualizing the universal, and giving it spiritual vitality, by the process of breaking down and superseding fixed and determinate thoughts [... das Aufheben der festen bestimmten Gedanken]. But it is much more difficult to bring fixed thoughts into fluidity than to bring sensuousness into this state [Es ist aber weit schwerer, die festen Gedanken in Flüssigkeit zu bringen, als das sinnliche Dasein]."

Jean Hyppolite, in summing up the intention of the Phenomenology, stated the matter simply enough: "The history of the world is finished; all that is needed is for the specific individual to rediscover it in himself." Stirner as an Einziger took himself directly to be that "specific individual" and then went on as a Hegelian to propose the practical consequence which would ultimately follow upon that theoretical rediscovery, the free play of self-consciousness among the objects of its own determination: "The idols exist through me; I need only refrain from creating them anew, then they exist no longer: 'higher powers,' exist only through my exalting them and abasing myself.... My intercourse with the world consists in my enjoying it, and so consuming it for my self-enjoyment" (Ego, 319).

If Stirner is interpretable in the manner suggested in this essay, then it can be said with more than merely historical significance that he was indeed "the last of the Hegelians."

Villanova University